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Iran Leadership Split Would Aid Leftists—CIA Director

Turner Sees Marxists, Terrorists as Victors in Clash of Khomeini Zealots and Bazargan Loyalists

BY NORMAN KEMPSTER

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WASHINGTON—CIA Director Stansfield Turner warned Friday that Iran's leftists could become the only winners if tension continues between the civilian government and Islamic religious leaders.

Turner said that the oil-rich and strategically located nation faces increased polarization between religious zealots loyal to the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the secular government of Premier Mehdi Bazargan.

Turner was asked during a breakfast meeting with the Washington bureau of The Times to predict which side would win a showdown between the Khomeini and Bazargan forces. He replied, "Neither... the leftists."

"That's my concern because the leftists are well-organized and well-armed," he said. "If there is a split between these other two (Khomeini and Bazargan), it leaves an opportunity for the Marxist guerrillas and terrorists to try to step in and take control."

Despite his concern about the activities of the country's domestic Communists, Turner said the Soviet Union had played a very low-key role in Iran.

"They are playing a two-track policy," Turner said. "They are quietly supporting the (Bazargan) government on one hand and undermining it with propaganda broadcasts and support for the Tudeh (Communist) Party on the other."

"They are still ambivalent because they haven't quite seen where it is going to go."

Turner and his intelligence agents have been criticized in various quarters for failing to foresee the fall of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and his pro-American government.

Turner said he resents talk of an intelligence "failure" in Iran. Nevertheless, he conceded that less than a month before violent riots last Nov. 4 that, some say, sealed the monarch's fate, the CIA still believed that the regime would survive.

"I persisted, personally, in believing well into the game, well into October, that the shah had the horsepower to take care of them (the opposition)," Turner said. "At the right time, before it got out of control, (I thought) he would step in with enough power to handle it...."

"The shah must have underestimated it, too," he said. "He eventually made the decision not to turn the troops loose and try to handle this through police means."

Turner was asked if he expected the shah to put down the revolution with his U.S.-equipped army.

"I expected him to have stepped in, yes," he said, "but before it got beyond the point of no-return."

He also said he did not "expect there would be this cohesiveness of the opposition."

"I don't want to try to exonerate myself or the CIA or the intelligence community for this; we would like to have done better," he said. "But don't measure whether we're doing our job for the country just because we led the decision-makers up to recognizing there was a problem but we didn't predict how it was going to evolve."

Turner, who is an admiral, made it clear that the Navy and Grumman Aircraft Co. will have to make some changes in the secret electronic equipment of the F-14 Tomcat that may have been compromised in Iran.

The Iranian air force has 78 F-14s and about 200 Phoenix air-to-air missiles that were purchased by the shah's regime. The Pentagon is concerned that if the Soviets were able to obtain one of the planes, they could learn how to neutralize its sophisticated equipment.

Turner said he was not prepared to denounce, even with the hindsight of the Iranian situation, the sale of the Navy's most sophisticated jet. He said he could not go into detail about his reasons but he gave a broad hint that the government had plans to reverse any compromise of security.

"It depends on how many ways you have of adapting your own system, so that it can't be countered, if you see what I mean," he said.